

Strategic Miscellany: Loose Ends, Open Questions, and the Lead-Organization Problem

Re: The items from May 17 that didn't fit the other memos but still need decisions

Date: May 17, 2026

Status: Decision memo for the June 3 meeting

Executive summary

This memo collects the strategic questions from May 17 that don't belong to a single workstream: whether to pursue aerial detection (drones), the proposed community film screening, the lead-organization question, the water-resources subcommittee, turnout gear, and a home-safety-check coordinator. Several of these are small; one — the lead-organization question — is foundational and should be settled at the June 3 meeting.

1. Drones / aerial detection — skip for now

The idea of a community drone for fire spotting is appealing but not yet worth the cost or complexity. A capable thermal-camera drone runs \$3,000–\$10,000+, requires an FAA Part 107 certified operator for any organizational use, is limited by line-of-sight rules and battery life (20–40 minutes), and duplicates detection we get more reliably from the fixed-sensor and satellite-based stack in the Detection Comparison. During an actual fire, airspace may be restricted by Temporary Flight Restrictions, and an unauthorized drone can ground firefighting aircraft — a genuine safety hazard. Recommendation: defer indefinitely; revisit only if a qualified Part 107 operator volunteers and a specific gap emerges.

2. Community film screening — yes, as an outreach anchor

The proposal to screen *The Lost Bus* (the dramatization of the Camp Fire school-bus evacuation) is a strong outreach idea. It supplies the emotional motivation that printed materials can't, and it pairs naturally with the Phase 2 community gathering in Memo 6. Recommendation: host a screening as the centerpiece of the Phase 2 gathering, follow it with a brief, calm committee presentation (not a fear pitch) and sign-ups, and have captains present to meet residents. Budget: minimal — a venue, a projector, and refreshments.

3. The lead-organization question — the foundational decision

Who actually runs this? Three entities are in play: Satchidananda Ashram – Yogaville (VSA), the residential and institutional body; AgniWellCare, Inc., the Virginia 501(c)(3) under which the committee currently operates; and the informal Fire Safety Committee itself. The ambiguity has real consequences for liability, fundraising, MOUs, and who can sign what.

The options

- **Option A — AgniWellCare leads (recommended, interim).** As an established 501(c)(3), AgniWellCare can hold funds, receive tax-deductible donations, sign MOUs, apply for grants, and carry insurance — the practical infrastructure the committee needs now. The committee operates as an AgniWellCare program.
- **Option B — VSA leads.** The ashram has the deepest institutional footprint and insurance, but layering a community-safety program into VSA governance is slower and entangles the project with institutional decision-making.
- **Option C — the committee incorporates separately.** Maximum autonomy, but a new entity means months of setup and duplicated overhead — unjustified when AgniWellCare already exists.

Recommendation

AgniWellCare leads on an interim basis through Q3 2026, with a structural review in October. This gives the committee a working legal and financial home immediately, while preserving the option to restructure once the program's scale and relationship to VSA are clearer. The review should explicitly ask whether a formal MOU between AgniWellCare and VSA is warranted, and whether any activities belong under VSA's insurance rather than AgniWellCare's.

4. Water-resources subcommittee — yes, small

Water supply for firefighting is a real question (ponds, tanks, draft points, hydrant equivalents) that no current workstream owns. Stand up a small water-resources subcommittee — one or two people — to inventory available water sources, identify draft points usable by the ashram fire truck and county engines, assess whether static water tanks or a dry hydrant are worth installing, and coordinate with Shiva Moore. Low cost to start (inventory and mapping); capital costs (tanks, dry hydrants) would come later as a separate proposal.

5. Turnout gear — budget realistically, tie to the Tier 2 core

Per Memo 1, structural turnout gear is the wrong category and donated past-retirement gear isn't compliant; what the Tier 2 FFT2 core actually needs is wildland gear (Nomex, leather boots, hard hat, gloves, fire shelter). Budget \$5,000–\$6,000 to outfit ~5 responders properly, tied directly to the Tier 2 firefighting decision rather than treated as a standalone purchase.

6. Home-safety-check coordinator — yes, name one

Defensible space (Memo 4) and outreach (Memo 6) both depend on someone organizing home-by-home safety assessments — scheduling the VA DOF assessments, coordinating the equipment library, tracking which households have completed which steps, and prioritizing elderly and absentee-owner properties. Name a single home-safety-check coordinator to own this, working with the road captains. This is a volunteer role, not a budget item, but without an owner it falls through the cracks.

7. Decision request

1. Defer drones indefinitely.
2. Approve a community film screening as the Phase 2 outreach anchor.
3. Adopt Option A — AgniWellCare leads on an interim basis through Q3 2026, with a structural review in October.
4. Stand up a small water-resources subcommittee and name its lead.
5. Budget \$5,000–\$6,000 for Tier 2 wildland turnout gear, contingent on the firefighting decision.
6. Name a home-safety-check coordinator.

8. Honest assessment

Most of these are small, but the lead-organization question is not — it determines who can sign MOUs, hold funds, and carry the liability the rest of the program generates. Settling it on June 3, even on an interim basis, unblocks nearly everything else. The rest are matters of naming an owner so that good ideas from May 17 don't quietly evaporate for lack of a person responsible.